COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

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COACH AND BUS WEEK CBW

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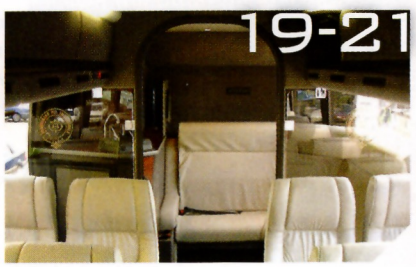

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TRANSDEV PRIMED FOR Y

One of the last municipals goes to Paris-based company

CBW STAFF

BOURNEMOUTH'S Yellow Buses look set to be sold to French-owned Transdev following two key council meetings on July 15.

The scrutiny panel and cabinet decided to accept the offer from Transdev in principle, subject to the approval of the full council on July 26. The group already operates buses, ferries, coaches, trams and trains via 80 subsidiaries in six different countries.

Its London United and Sovereign subsidiary runs 700 buses in London, while Transdev operates Nottingham's trams, along with the city's buses in association with the local authority.

If successful, Transdev's bid will net it a fleet of 130-plus vehicles – many modern lowfloors – plus premises, and 'privatise' one of the few remaining municipal bus companies. Transdev was among several interested parties including Go-Ahead but is said to have offered the highest bid.

It has agreed to keep and promote the Yellow Buses identity. It has also pledged to continue existing social routes for at least two years, and to accept the company's pension deficit liabilities, estimated at around £3.8 million.

Yellow Buses routes are already under attack from Go-Ahead-owned Wilts & Dorset, which has registered high-frequency services around W&D's eastern operating boundary.

Bournemouth Council will be given a 10% shareholding and Transdev will take over the potential capital gains tax liability from Bournemouth Transport Limited. The French company has offered to commit to using the bus depot, with claw-back provisions for the council in the event of a sale or refinancing within the first ten years.

Detailed negotiations are continuing and final agreement is subject to Government approval.

● TRANSDEV has won a tender to manage Genoa's urban transport system, which includes buses, trolleybuses, a 'metro' line, cable cars, rack railway and tourist bus routes.

In the deal, Transdev gets a 41% share of the city-owned transport company, AMT S.p.A, for a stake of 22.6 million euros. Its offer included rationalisation of services, provision of a guided busway and tram line, and extension of the metro route. It expects the acquisition to make a net contribution of 850m euros in the next six years.

STAGECOACH BUYS GTL

AFTER months of speculation about a possible suitor, Merseyside bus operator Glenvale Transport Limited (GTL) has been bought by Stagecoach for £3.4m.

Both Keolis and Transdev were linked to the deal, as was National Express until it withdrew from negotiations.

The sale was hotly contested since Glenvale reportedly holds 25% of the Merseyside local bus market, and 38% of Merseyside households do not have access to a car.

Brian Souter, Stagecoach chief executive, said: "Glenvale is a substantial independent city-centre bus operator, and it is an excellent strategic fit with Stagecoach's successful UK bus division.

"Stagecoach has demonstrated its ability to deliver impressive growth in its UK Bus division as a result of initiatives including Kick Start, sector-leading telemarketing campaigns and online sales.

In our recently reported results for the year ended April 30, 2005, turnover in our UK bus division was up 10.8%."

Stagecoach has also taken on Glenvale's £7.8m debt, meaning a total outlay of £11.2m on the deal. Stagecoach has also set aside funds to modernise Glenvale's 275-strong fleet, to be completed by April 2006.

Dominic Brady, the founder and managing director of GTL, left the company with effect from the date of the takeover on July 12. Stagecoach say a new appointment will be made in due course.

Glenvale was formed in 2001 after a management buy-in from Arriva and operates from two depots in north east Liverpool, and turns over £25m per year.

PARKING CHARGES FEEDBACK WANTED

COACH parking consultant Bob Pilbeam wants to hear from anyone who has been affected by parking charges in the Bognor Regis area.

Earlier this year, a charge of £6 was implemented in council-run coach parks in Bognor, Littlehampton and Arundel, having previously been free of charge. It's initially a one-year trial period, and feedback from coach operators could play a big part in whether or not the charge is dropped next April.

If you feel these charges have affected your decision to go to these destinations, contact Bob Pilbeam at the Confederation of Passenger Transport by email at *bobp@cpt-uk.org* or call him on 020 7240 6565 and he'll pass all messages on to the relevant authorities.

BLUE BUS TO GO TO ARRIVA

LANCASHIRE'S largest independent operator, Blue Bus of Bolton, will be taken over by Arriva North West and Wales at the end of this month, bringing a new range of services, both in Greater Manchester and Lancashire to Arriva.

Details of the deal are sketchy, as negotiations are still in the hands of legal advisers, but it is understood that all but one of the 85 buses will be acquired together with staff and services transferring. Arriva is understood to be taking over the main Bolton garage, but smaller operating outstations are unlikely to survive for long.

Blue Bus was founded in 1991 by two former Shearings employees and was based at Horwich, with routes into Bolton. Rapid expansion including a base in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, between 1994 and 1996, took the fleet over the 100 mark.

In July 2002, the company moved to Bolton, taking over Blazefield Group operations and 19 buses, which Blazefield had taken over as a loss-maker from Stagecoach, a year earlier. Industry sources suggest that the burden of the new operations together with escalating fuel and insurance costs, may have forced the sale. Indeed, among other signs of distress over the last 12 months, Blue Bus has been selling newer vehicles and buying secondhand Metro-Riders and also handing some routes out to other independent operators.

Proprietor Roger Jarvis, who founded the company in 1991, was unwilling to comment about the deal, but it is believed that he will be leaving the company, although other members of his family who work for the company may be transferring with the business.

ELLOW BUS DEAL

DRIVERS STRIKE OVER PAY

A RASH of disputes over drivers' pay and conditions have broken out across the country with major bus companies hit by industrial action.

Services in Edinburgh, the north west, Swansea, and Devon and Cornwall have all been disrupted, as well as administration in London.

Drivers are demanding wage increases of as much as 10% in some cases.

All the strikes are by members of either the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) or the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). The RMT is in dispute with First Devon and Cornwall and Transport for London. The TGWU is in dispute with Lothian buses in Scotland, Stagecoach in the north west and First Cymru in Wales.

> "Our members would not be taking this action unless they had an industrial issue..."

Union officials deny there is a co-ordinated plan to disrupt bus services nationwide, or that drivers are flexing their muscles because of the driver shortage. They say the driver shortage has led to bus companies reorganising working practices and imposing unreasonable hours and conditions on their members.

"Our members would not be taking this action unless they had an industrial issue," says Allan Gray, TGWU north west regional organiser. "The disputes around the country are because the bus companies are trying to cut back on non-lucrative routes, and lengthening driving stints to cover shifts. We understand that these companies have a duty to their shareholders, but they are putting this ahead of their duty to their employees."

John Conroy, managing director of Stagecoach north west, says, "I haven't detected a rise in militancy. The fact is that drivers' pay is increasing at a much faster rate than inflation, and it's inevitable that this then feeds into passenger fares."

The First Cymru dispute is over a rejected pay deal: staff are reportedly demanding a 10% wage increase. The TGWU accepted an earlier offer from the company but it was rejected by staff who staged a four hour walkout on July 15. The union says further strike action is possible.

TGWU Stagecoach members in the North west postponed a strike ballot on July 14 following fresh talks with management, but the threat of strike action still looms.

Lothian bus drivers started an overtime ban on July 17, followed by a one day strike on July 18. Another stoppage is planned for July 30 and 31. The Lothian dispute centres around a rejected pay offer and the conditions linked to it. The unions want 6.15% while the company is offering 5%, linked to a change in working hours and holiday entitlement. 82% of the 1400 Lothian drivers represented by TGWU rejected the deal.

More than 650 RMT members at First Devon and Cornwall held a strike on July 8, imposed a week's voluntary overtime ban from July 10, and plan a further 24 hour strike on July 21.

The dispute in the south west centres over an undertaking by the company to close the pay differentials between drivers of large and small vehicles. In addition, the union has demanded a 4.2% pay rise, while First have offered 3.2%.

The TfL strike action is over a long running dispute involving staff at the TfL call centre, the London Transport Museum as well as office staff, revenue control inspectors, bus controllers and staff instructors.

EDITOR'S COMMENT

POLES APART?

IT SEEMS from the sidelines that there's a rash of pay-bargaining disputes afflicting the industry.

Having sat through a few pay negotiations myself over the years, I understand only too well how these things can drag on, with each side having to consult and calculate every time there is any movement or any fresh proposition. So I'm not reading too much into the three or four agreements which have yet to be struck.

On the other hand, I'm sure I detect a whiff of union empowerment. Perhaps buoyed up by the continuing recruitment problems within the industry, the RMT and T&G seem to be making these market forces work for them.

The industry does need a committed workforce of drivers rather than a hotch-potch of itinerant 'steering wheel minders' doing the rounds. Getting there certainly involves paying a living wage and ensuring that working conditions are as good as possible.

But in the context of a great many jobs, it's my impression that the improvement in pay over the last few years has been a step ahead of inflation; an advert for drivers in the south of England promises the best part of £18,000 a year.

There may still be some need for incremental improvement, but the search within the accession states for Eastern European recruits seems now to be bearing fruit. Bus passengers will soon be getting used to the sound of the 400 Poles working on First's buses, and recruitment agencies say it's the tip of the iceberg.

For many Britons, bus driving doesn't come with status. For many economic migrants, the dignity of honest toil rewarded by a living wage isn't available at home, and status doesn't come into the equation.

So market forces are at work on both sides. It will be interesting to see where, in terms of hourly rate, the equilibrium lies.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
EDITOR

ARTICS SLATED IN SEOUL

Accidents and complaints could see end of Korean venture

MARTIN COLE, TECHNICAL AND MINIBUS EDITOR

ARTICULATED buses in the Korean city of Seoul have been a big disappointment and plans to introduce up to 200 of them are now in jeopardy.

A report in the Korean Times says city officials are seriously considering phasing out the artics following complaints from passengers, technical hitches, a spate of accidents and a question mark over cost efficiency.

Introduced in September 2004, the initial batch of 20 buses were promoted as the city's new means of mass transportation – a bid to transform transport modes in the city at a vastly lower cost than implementing subway or monorail systems. Plans to increase the role of the bus and bring the number of artics to 53 by the end of the year - and up to 200 by 2008 to create a Bus Rapid Transit network, are now likely to be shelved and the capacity taken up by conventional lowfloor citybuses.

Built by Irisbus, the 18m vehicles carry up to 140 passengers and are powered by CNG-fuelled engines. The decision to take them was made to assist in increasing the efficiency of Seoul's transportation system, reducing impact on the environment and reducing operating costs through higher capacity.

According to the report, maintenance has been a major problem as bus company staff are untrained in the technology and have limited access to spare parts. Breakdowns in the city cause massive disruption to traffic and roadside repairs take an excessively long time as staff are unfamiliar with vehicle systems and diagnostics. Most problems are said to be from the engines and the air conditioning systems.

Local LG International Corporation imported the vehicles and is reported as being in a position to oversee maintenance and repair of the vehicles – yet it supposedly has just one employee who was briefly trained on the product in Italy. Vehicles sent to LG International are eventually returned but held up many weeks waiting for spare parts.

Passenger complaints mainly criticise the computerised climate control systems which don't allow drivers any manual control over settings. They complain the settings in summer are too high and buses not cool enough, or they are too low in winter months and passengers are cold. They also complain about cramped seating space.

PBs THE STAR OF LUCKETTS FLEET

A PAIR of Scania Irizar PBs bought for Lucketts' tour programme are performing well, says the Fareham operator.

The identical 12.9-metre, 48-seaters have not only carried a growing number of holidaymakers at home and abroad, but are attracting stares and business when they are one the road.

"They have a special livery which we're very pleased with, and the outcome is a really imposing vehicle," said MD Ian Luckett.

"We had a problem with a door on one, which was put right by Scania within 24 hours. The only other problem we have is drivers arguing about who's driving tours."

The K114EB-based vehicles have many touring refinements including the standard air-con, video and toilet, plus seats with armrests and leather headrest insets. ZF automatic five-speed transmission has been specified for the PBs.

EVENTS

August 2 - 4: RDA Workshop, Cologne, Germany. *www.rda-workshop.de*

August 14: Wessex Transport Society fourth Festival of Transport, Avon Heath Country Park, A31, near Ringwood, Hants. 01202 293245

September 12-14: Tourism Ireland education trip to East Ireland (including Dublin). 020 7518 0800, *fcreedon@tourismireland.com*

September 14-15: Passenger Transport Solutions, Olympia, London. *www.aboutpts.com*

September 15: Driver incentive programmes for crash avoidance, BRAKE afternoon workshop. TNT Logistics, Tamworth. Contact Adam Casper, 01484 559909, email *brake@brake.org.uk*

September 15: RDA Market Seminar, Bridgewood Manor Hotel, Rochester, Kent. *Dr.patridge@t-online.de*, 0049 6997 84 0206

September 19-21: Tourism Ireland education trip to West Ireland. 020 7518 0800, *fcreedon@tourismireland.com*

September 20: Transport Innovation Fund Conference - Radical Solutions to Transport Problems, CBI Conference Centre, London. 01224 263134

September 28: Managing driver agencies. BRAKE afternoon workshop. Knutsford, Cheshire. Contact Adam Casper, 01484 559909, email *brake@brake.org.uk*

September 29: Ergomechanics conference - seating and back pain, Amberg, Germany. 00 49 9621 880886, sandra. *mohr@grammer.com*

September 29-30: International

Guided busway on track

THE government has granted stage-two approval to a new guided busway scheme in Manchester.

But all is not well with two other guided busways. The proposed Huntingdon/ Cambridge route has hit delays and the Edinburgh scheme has run into opposition after a bus lost its 'jockey' wheel.

Manchester has been granted Transport and Works Act powers for a 7km guided busway linking Leigh and Salford, Greater Manchester. GMPTA and the ten local councils involved in the scheme can now apply for funding and will put in an application later this year.

At the same time, plans for a guided busway linking Huntingdon and Cambridge hit delays. The scheme is still awaiting approval after the original inspector's report was lost after a computer glitch. The report is being re-written and will be submitted to the Department of Transport by the end of July 2005. A decision is expected before the end of the year.

In Edinburgh, a taxi was hit by a detached guide wheel last week, causing £160 worth of damage and stirring up more controversy over the £10m scheme, which opened eight years ago.

The 'jockey' wheels from two services using the busway had already been withdrawn for repairs at the time of the incident, while part of the route has been closed for some weeks to level the concrete surface.

"What happened to my cab is just more evidence that the huge expense spent on this guided busway was completely wasted," said the taxi driver. "Why didn't they just widen the road and put in an extra bus lane on either side of the road, instead of spending such a lot of money on the Fastlink? These things are obviously dangerous."

A spokesman for Lothian buses called what happened to the taxi an isolated incident, adding, "It's a matter for the respective insurance companies to deal with, therefore we cannot comment any further."

Carmarthen builds 16 new coach bays

CARMARTHEN has responded to criticism of its coach parking, pointing out that it is busy developing new bays at the railway station.

An angry reader who wrote to *CBW* claimed her company's coach had been issued a parking ticket while picking up in the Welsh town, despite there being no alternative place: "My advice to operators is to think twice before bringing visitors into a town with such poor facilities for parking coaches," the letter concluded.

But Carmarthenshire County Council's strategy engineer, Sue Miles, has now reassured operators that, thanks to funding from the Welsh Assembly, the problem is being addressed.

"The council certainly accepts that the current situation is far from ideal, and that is why we submitted a transport grant bid to the Welsh Assembly Government for funding to develop a transport interchange, including coach parking, at Carmarthen Railway Station," she told *CBW*.

"The physical works have now started and the result will be 16 coach parking spaces adjacent to the station with a new landmark foot/cycle bridge providing a direct link to the town centre. The new interchange should be open in the New Year, and we certainly hope that your anonymous reader and others will continue to visit Carmarthen."

Brittle is Heavy Duty

HEAVY Duty Parts have appointed Gareth Brittle as their latest team member.

Gareth is the second new parts specialist to join the Heavy Duty team this year, his product knowledge covers Neoplan, Iveco Beulas & MAN Noge, having previously worked for Mentor Coach & Bus. Due to continuing growth within the Neoplan, Setra, Mercedes & MAN parts market, Gareth's knowledge should be a valued part of the company's future.

Group Leisure & Travel Show, Hall 1, Wembley, London. 01908 613323, e-mail *sharon.d@leisureshow.com* - *www.leisureshow.com*

October 5-6: Coach & Bus Live 2005, NEC, Birmingham. 0870 224 8617 *www.coachandbuslive.com*

October 20: Developing a fleet safety culture. BRAKE afternoon workshop. Crewe, Cheshire. Contact Adam Casper, 01484 559909, email *brake@brake.org.uk*

October 21-26: Busworld, Kortrijk, Belgium. 00 32 51 226060, *info@busworld.org*

November 8-10: Community Transport Event 2005, G-Mex, Manchester. Contact the CTA at *www.communitytransport.com*, or call 08707 743586

November 28-29: Scottish Transport Awards Dinner & Conference, Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa, Edinburgh. 01224 263134

2006:

March 14-16: International Road Transport Union 30th World Congress, Dubai World Trade Centre. *www.iru.org*

April 4: London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

April 22/23: UK Coach Rally, Brighton

November 7-9: Euro Bus Expo, NEC. 0870 224 8619, *eurobusxpo@expom.co.uk*

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COMPANY USED BANNED DRIVERS

Lack of licenses lands Thandi Buses in trouble

A TRANSPORT manager who employed bus drivers without current licenses has had his PSV O discs reduced at a public inquiry.

Mr Sukwant Thandi, operator of Sukwant Thandi Buses, from Smethwick, West Midlands, was issued with an order which limits the number of vehicles he is authorised to operate for a two month period.

For August and September, Mr Thandi is limited to operating four vehicles under his PSV licence, rather than his normal six vehicles, after police and vehicle examiners' operations revealed that two of his drivers did not hold current licenses.

Deputy Traffic Commissioner Lester Maddrell passed the order after finding that Mr Thandi's repute as a transport manager had been stained by the incident.

Traffic examiner Ms Marion Wilson told the inquiry an allegation had been received by police that Mr Thandi employed drivers who had been disqualified.

During an interview in September 2004, Mr Thandi told Ms Wilson that he had employed a man, known to him as Miller, without ever checking his PSV entitlement or his driving licence. During the inquiry he also admitted he did not inform the insurance company of his new driver.

Mr Thandi told the inquiry: "The first thing I asked him was 'how long have you been driving?' and 'can I see your licence?'.

> "I admit I made a mistake. There will not be a next time."

"He said he'd just moved from the North and was waiting for his paperwork."

On June 8, 2004, police called at Mr Thandi's yard in Smethwick, looking for Miller, who also went under the names of Darke and Johnson.

Mr Thandi contacted Miller, who was on a job, telling him there was a problem with the bus, and, on his return to the yard, police arrested him for driving whilst disqualified.

Mr Thandi, who has held his PSV license since 1992, had previously had it suspended for six months after failing to have a tachograph checked appropriately. He admitted to the inquiry that he had employed Miller without ever checking his credentials.

He said: "I admit I made a mistake. There will not be a next time."

He also told the inquiry that he accepted full responsibility for the matter and had subsequently introduced a policy of checking the licenses of his drivers every three months.

A second disqualified driver was also employed by Sukwant Thandi Buses, but deputy Traffic Commissioner Lester Maddrell told the inquiry he accepted that Mr Thandi had been presented with documents that were not valid and that Mr Thandi had not known of any other procedure of checking a drivers accreditation with the DVLA.

RUSSIAN TENDERS FOR SIGHTSEEING TOURS

EUROPEAN operators are being invited to tender for the official city bus tour service in St Petersburg, Russia.

Branded 'City-Tour St Petersburg', the contract starts on November 1, and will be initially for three closed top double deckers. Open top buses are illegal in Russia.

The closing date for tenders is August 1 and the winner will be announced a week later. Several companies have expressed an interest - none from the UK - although none have yet made a formal application. A start-up grant of 3.6m roubles (approx £72,000) is available for the successful operator.

The city is currently also tendering for the creation of a "City-Tour St Petersburg" logo and branding which will be applied to the buses. The city is also planning to build a series of bus stops which it will pay for itself.

Likely revenues are uncertain since St Petersburg has never had a service like this before, but city officials estimate levels will be similar to the services run in Paris, London and Berlin.

Operators will be required to demonstrate current experience in tourism; current experience in realising similar projects; details of the buses and maintenance schedules; route plans and a 'technical and economic assessment of the project'.

City officials envisage a uniform fleet of vehicles, a route that covers the principal monuments of St Petersburg, an 'interesting' high-quality audio-tour with multi-language facility for Russian, English, German, French, Spanish and Japanese, and a convenient timetable.

FACTFILE

Contact: Igor Devyatko, tel: 00 7 812 576-7045/ 6067 or e-mail: *deviatko@cisp.gov.spb.ru*

EUROLINES

EUROLINES has followed the successful launch of its low cost Eurolines PLUS service to Paris last year – a conservative estimate puts passenger numbers up 15% - Eurolines has now extended the service to Amsterdam.

The company has dedicated three 14-metre VDL Bova HD 139-430XE Magnums for the job, operated by Amsterdam-based Bovo Tours. Each coach seats 56 with legroom of 79cm.

The service runs 25 times a week and takes 10.5 hours. Standard fare is £36 return, although

Charity needs help with 1961 windscreen

A LIVERPOOL charity organisation, Kids' Wheels, is desperately seeking a coach windscreen from a 1961 Plaxton Panorama.

The organisation, based in Garston and run by schoolteacher Paul Dodd, recently received a lottery grant to aid with refurbishing the coach – which has been completed with the exception of obtaining a new windscreen. All the usual avenues of contacting suppliers and used coach dealers have been pursued but nothing has turned up yet.

Tony Natale of Northwest Coach & Bus Windscreens has been aiding Paul Dodd in his quest but so far they have drawn a blank.

Mr Natale said: "If anyone out there knows the whereabouts of a suitable screen we would be delighted to hear from them.

"Our only alternative at present is to take the old screen to a manufacturer and have a new batch made – but this will be a very expensive way of getting the problem solved.

"The charity has spent a lot of money bringing the coach up to a good standard and now can't use it. If anyone can help please call Paul on 07946 301085, or myself on 07765 241722."

Kids' Wheels takes parties of underprivileged children on outings and short breaks.

Seatbelts crucial

TWELVE children and an adult were taken to hospital on July 14 after a collision between two coaches in Co. Wicklow – though children on board the vehicles say that seatbelts prevented more serious injury.

"There was a loud bang and we lurched forward," said 10-year-old Conor Price. "But the seatbelt stopped me going any further."

The two coaches, operated by MacDiarmiada of Co. Kildare were fitted with seatbelts as they are sometimes used on school services under contract to Dublin Bus. At the time of the accident they were carrying a party of 62 children and seven adults home from a visit to the Clara Lara Funpark near Laragh, Co. Wicklow.

Gardai are investigating the circumstances surrounding the crash, in which one coach apparently rear-ended the other, which had braked suddenly to avoid a vehicle pulling out on to the road. The collision caused the windscreen of the second bus to shatter, but neither of the drivers was seriously injured.

Metro's new man

KARAM HUSSAIN, Kirklees Liberal Democrat councillor, has been elected chairman of Metro following the recent West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority's annual general meeting.

Councillor Hussain has reaffirmed Metro's commitment to developing affordable, high-quality public transport for the population of West Yorkshire. He said: "Transport is key to all aspects of life right across West Yorkshire from large cities and towns to the smallest and most remote rural communities.

"I am committed to Metro's aims of further developing the county's highly successful rail network, of bringing about significant improvements in bus services and of course, securing the vital Leeds Supertram scheme. We are currently finalising a strong, second Local Transport Plan for the period 2006, which will be submitted to the DfT next year.

"Alongside it, we are drawing up and costing West Yorkshire's real transport needs in the short, medium and long term, which we will also be presenting to Ministers in a bid to reverse the £200m Department for Transport under-spend which this region suffers from every year."

Free accessibility seminar

A European research organisation that has previously advised the EU on accessibility regulations will hold a free seminar to present its findings on coach accessibility in October. The European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST), under the auspices of the EC and the European Science Foundation, has examined: the needs of disabled people; vehicle design; infrastructure design; information and training, and the economic implications for operators. The seminar will be held at Busworld, Kortrijk in Holland on 25 October 2005. See www.angelamccarthy.co.uk for more details.

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a summer promotional fare of £32 return is available.

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Eurolines has also revealed plans to further extend the service to Cork later this year.

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BARD'S COUNTRY IS READY FOR CHRISTMAS

Variety of events ideal for groups to be staged around Stratford

SHAKESPEARE Country is gearing itself up for Christmas with a mix of events which should keep your customers occupied.

Warwick, Kenilworth, Royal Leamington Spa and Stratford-upon-Avon have laid on the festive spirit thickly; all the area needs now is some snow! All four towns will be hanging out the Christmas lights to get shoppers in the yuletide mood - which will all be switched on by December.

In Leamington, the traditional Christmas market starts early, from October 2 right through to December 20. If your customers like their shopping, you could also take them to Warwick on Thursday, December 1, when there is a Victorian Christmas Fair on its streets.

Nine days later, Warwick Castle begins its Frost Fair, running through to January 2. The courtyard will get an outdoor ice rink, and the usual themed entertainment and costumed characters will pep up the atmosphere.

Stratford's four Christmas fairs are on December 1, 8, 15 and 22. While you are there, plan a visit to Shakespeare's birthplace, which will be 'dressed' in hand-made, traditional Christmas decorations.

You can round off a visit by going to the RSC's tribute to Dickens, the *Great Expectations* performances are on at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre from November 25 onwards. Make it any of the four Thursdays before Christmas, and you'll find the coach parks are free.

● Planning your Christmas shopping excursions? Get the latest information from *Out&About*, FREE with this issue!

JUST FOR EWE...

THE pulling power of sheep was proven for more than 20 years by the TV series *One Man and His Dog*, and now Welsh attraction Ewe-Phoria aims to carry on where it left off.

Sheepdog Trials World Champion Aled Owen provides the action, rounding up sheep on the hillside while the audience enjoys the spectacle in comfort from behind a panoramic glass window. There's sheep shearing on stage and an explanation of the 13 rare-breed rams kept at the Betwys-y-Coed attraction.

Your customers' 'little lambs' are catered for, with a children's play area and bouncy castle. If you need another reason to visit, the 45-seat restaurant on site is perfect for pre-booked groups, and claims to offer truly excellent food. Drivers get a free meal and bottle of wine to take home.

There are two live shows and sheepdog demonstrations each day, starting at 1100hrs and 1300hrs, or 1400hrs after August. Admission is £4.50 for adults, £3.20 for children over three, and senior citizens £4.

● Contact Ewe-Phoria on 01490 460225 or via the website *www.ewe-phoria.co.uk*

HAGGIS GETS AWARD

BACKPACKING tour specialist Haggis Adventures - which uses midicoaches to carry its customers across Scotland - has won a Green Tourism Business Award. The Edinburgh-based company, which offers tours throughout the province, including whale-watching and island-hopping, sent Peter Smith, operations manager, and Craig Irving (pictured) to collect the award.

SHOW MIGHT BE AN EYE-OPENER

THE International Group Leisure & Travel Show at Wembley Conference Centre could be the right place to not only talk to existing suppliers but to drum up ideas for new products.

Staged on September 29 and 30, the trade-only exhibition has attracted Finnish, Danish, Italian, Dutch, Swiss and Hungarian companies, together with cruise lines, hotels groups, and representatives from a wide range of UK attractions

A central stage area will be used for seminars and product talks, while the annual awards evening will be held on Thursday September 29.

If you hit the buffers with tired legs, Norwegian Cruise Lines has sponsored a VIP Exhibitor Lounge where you can sit down and have a coffee. You won't be hungry either, because each morning between 1000 and 1100hrs, you can grab a free bacon butty.

● Find out more on the website *www.leisureshow.com* or via Yandeel Exhibitions on 01908 613323

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IF you've ever wondered whether Poland would make a quality, low-cost destination for your tours, stop wondering and find out on our Polish Study Tour.

We've lined up the best in the Krakow region to show you what's on offer, and rounded the trip off with a visit to a local coach operator who will not only tell you what it feels like to be part of the EU, but will explain what he can do for fly-coach packages. Staying at the ideally located Wyspianski Hotel in Krakow, our group will visit two of Poland's most visited destinations, accompanied by professional guides and escorted by *CBW* and Success Tours.

The astonishing Wieliczka salt mines are a complete underground visitor attraction, all carved from salt. Begun in the Middle Ages, the salt mines are a UNESCO world heritage site, which combine examples of centuries of mining technology with sights that truly have the 'wow' factor.

Around a million visitors a year are drawn by this vast underground citadel which includes two ornate subterranean chapels and huge galleries which will take your breath away.

We also visit Auschwitz - said to be one of the most moving experiences. Possibly the best preserved of Hitler's death camps, it bears silent testimony to the horror of the genocide that is within the living memory of many coach tour passengers.

Krakow itself has plenty to offer, as a short tour of the city will demonstrate, but you can hear it from the horse's mouth during a visit to a local coach operator who will answer your questions about the attractions and what he can offer if you decide you might run fly-coach city tours.

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I would like to join the *Coach and Bus Week* Study Tour to Krakow, on November 21 to 23. Please reserve a place for me and invoice me for the deposit by August 19.

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DRIVEN TO INQUIRY

With drivers in short supply, our legal experts provide a reminder of the offences and penalties for getting into trouble

PCV drivers and their employers have a higher duty to report matters which relate to a driver's conduct and their fitness to hold a vocational licence than HGV drivers.

This is by want of section 121 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, as amended, which defines "conduct" as *"his conduct both as the driver of the motor vehicle and in any other respect relevant to his holding a PCV licence"*.

A commonly held belief by PCV drivers is that a traffic commissioner will be concerned with personal circumstances, often used in mitigation before the criminal courts. In fact they rarely are concerned (unless they specifically relate to a driver's conduct while driving) since the criminal courts deal with punishing a person for the offence whereas a traffic commissioner is only considering whether that person is fit to hold a vocational licence. As a result it cannot be said that someone is being punished twice for the same offence.

So what action is likely to be taken by a traffic commissioner when cautions or convictions are imposed and reported?

DRIVERS' HOURS AND TACHO OFFENCES

Traffic commissioners expect vocational licence holders to fully acquaint themselves with the relevant legislation before undertaking employment as a "professional driver." The following guidelines for breaches are therefore applicable:

- Drivers' hours offences committed on infrequent or isolated occasions: Formal warning. (The traffic commissioners stress that mitigation to the effect that the offence was "just over" the limit is unlikely to be seen as a reasonable excuse.)
- Persistent and/or habitual transgressions: A minimum of a four week suspension period, to be increased in accordance with the number of offences found.

TACHOGRAPH RECORDS

Traffic commissioners will regard tacho falsification as more serious than the offence it was designed to conceal.

In a recent Court of Appeal decision in the case of Crown v Saunders and others appeals against the imposition of eight months' imprisonment for tachograph falsification were dismissed, the Court of Appeal commenting that there will be serious consequences to those who are caught.

The traffic commissioners Practice Directions indicate the following sanctions:

- One month's suspension per offence for up to three false records
- Revocation and disqualification for up to six months for up to five offences
- Revocation and disqualification for 12 months for six or more offences
- Use of any device to interfere with the recording equipment. Revocation and disqualification for 12 months.

SPEED LIMITERS

There has been widespread abuse of speed limiters, which are designed to ensure road safety and fair competition between operators. Traffic commissioners take the view that disabling a speed limiter is a clear intent to exceed the legally permitted speed:

- Speeding when the limiter is not working but there is no evidence of tampering but there is clear written evidence of the driver bringing the matter to his employer's attention, for example on the tachograph chart or defect reporting sheet. Formal warning.
- Speeding in a vehicle when the limiter is not working but no evidence of tampering but also no evidence that the driver has brought the matter to the attention of his employer. One month suspension period
- Speeding in a vehicle with a disabled speed limiter and evidence of tampering or interference by the driver. Suspension/revocation and disqualification from between two to four months.
- Use of any device to disable the speed limiter. Revocation and disqualification for between six to 12 months.

OTHER CRIMINAL OFFENCES

Sex offences: All convictions or police cautions for sexual offences will almost invariably warrant the revocation of that person's PCV licence. Specifically, those which require registration on the Sex Offenders Register are deemed so serious that in almost all cases the traffic commissioner will disqualify the offender for an indefinite period.

- Assaults, theft, drugs-related offences: Other offences such as serious assaults, all forms of theft or the supply of drugs will also give rise to the traffic commissioner considering the suitability of the offender to hold a PCV licence.
- Minor driving offences: In this category matters considered as "minor" by drivers such as fixed penalty speeding offences must also be reported and can give rise to action being taken. Offences such as dangerous or careless driving will be taken seriously, especially if undertaken while driving a bus or coach.

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FIRST FACES SECOND INQUIRY

Traffic commissioner defers decision after hearing of damning prohibition rate

CBW CORRESPONDENT

FIRST Bristol has been threatened with licence revocation after 41% of its inspected vehicles failed to meet basic standards, a public inquiry heard last week.

A hearing into the safety standards of First Bristol buses was launched after spot checks carried out between November 2004 and February 2005 revealed a number of faults.

Of the 46 buses examined at Muller Road Depot, Bristol, 19 were deemed faulty - and 11 got immediate prohibitions.

The public inquiry heard that three of the buses had oil leaking from their engines, while others had steering errors and faulty brake systems. The rest were found to have loose fuel tanks or fan belts, dirty passenger seats, faulty tyres, jammed emergency doors and no hammers to break the glass in an emergency.

WHAT THE VEHICLE EXAMINER SAID

GARY FORD, an examiner for the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) - which carried out the checks - said First Bristol Ltd had failed to carry out proper safety maintenance.

He said that although First had adhered to checking its 300-strong fleet every 28 days as is required, many of the checks were incomplete.

The inquiry heard how staff had omitted to record tyre treads and mileages of the buses and had failed to report any faults they found while on their journeys in the correct way. Staff also frequently "signed-off" buses as checked when, in fact, they hadn't been.

The investigations, carried out in February 2005, found that one bus had oil leaking from the engine. But records showed that on January 14 and 31, the problem had been reported and then marked as rectified.

On another bus, the exhaust system was found to be leaking. Mr Ford said: "It was exceptionally corroded and holed. I believe it should have been picked up at the last safety inspection."

The hearing was told how a previous investigation in November 2002 had discovered the safety conditions and maintenance of the fleet was fairly satisfactory. But the vehicles were not being checked within the required 28 days.

In April 2004, an independent audit carried out by the Freight Transport Association also revealed there was "room for improvement". Mr Ford said: "They found the daily walk-round checks were not being carried-out correctly."

During these inspections, 137 First buses were examined between February 5, 2002 and March 8, 2005. Of these, 32 got PG9s, 18 of which were immediates. The figures equate to 23% having defects, 13% with safety implications.

This was higher than the national rate for spot checks on buses - with an estimated 7% deemed unroadworthy and 8% classed as fixable during the same period. Mr Ford said the report showed many of the defects had been signed off when they shouldn't have been.

Drivers had a system for a walk-round check in the morning before they started their routes. But, the inquiry heard, when faults became apparent during the day, there was not an adequate system of documenting them.

WHAT THE OPERATOR SAID

FIRST, which carries 34 million passengers every year, admitted there had been problems with their system but said things had improved.

Mr Stephen Kirkbright, of Ford Warren Solicitors, said: "This is unusual because it seems that up to November 2004, all the indicators showed that things appeared to be going well. All the Freight Transport Association audits indicated that it was satisfactory."

Defending First, Mr Kirkbright asked the chairman not to suspended the service or revoke its licence, which would have a "catastrophic effect".

Alex Perry, managing director of First Bristol Ltd, said the failings had only begun in January 2005 when a number of the management team were off sick. He said: "There were very serious problems in January and February 2005.

"We were all shocked at what was found, particularly when five prohibitions were found on seven vehicles. There was a particular management problem at Muller Road which led to falling standards."

Mr Perry said the company had now employed three semi-skilled engineering staff to check the buses in the evenings and had improved its staff training. He added that stopping or suspending the service would not be in the passengers' best interest.

WHAT THE TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER SAID

MR BROWN reminded the inquiry that it wasn't the first time First had come before him for failing to meet standards. On a previous occasion he had reduced the number of buses the firm was allowed to operate - only to have his ruling overturned when First showed they had improved.

Addressing Mr Perry, he said: "If you had had the system in place someone could have nipped the problem in the bud."

Referring to the initial spot checks carried out in November 2004, he said: "If you had sent a team in during November, you could have found the problems yourself."

Mr Brown deferred making a decision for ten to 14 days.

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WFQ LEGAL

LEGAL UPDATE

THIS YEAR some major changes in health and safety law which will affect all businesses across the UK. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will now implement changes to occupational health and safety law and practice from within the UK only on two dates each year. The two "common commencement dates" are April 6 and October 1.

WORK AT HEIGHT REGULATIONS 2005

When?

CAME INTO FORCE APRIL 2005

What it says...

Consolidating previous legislation on working at height, the new regulations came into force on 6 April, 2005.

As part of the Regulations, duty holders must ensure:

- all work at height is properly planned and organised;
- those involved in work at height are competent;
- the risks from work at height are assessed and appropriate work equipment is selected and used;
- the risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and
- equipment for work at height is properly inspected and maintained.

Falls from height remain the single biggest cause of workplace deaths and one of the biggest causes of major injury.

COSHH (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2004

When?

CAME INTO FORCE APRIL 2005

What it says...

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (Amendment) Regulations 2004 comes into force. The changes being a new focus on good practice by the introduction of eight principles helping employers prevent their employee's health being harmed by chemicals in the workplace. The new system clarifies existing duties and amendments include:

- The introduction of a single new "workplace exposure limit" (WEL), replacing the previous two-tier system.

Working at height: new regulation came in last April

- For particularly hazardous substances, such as carcinogens, in addition to having a WEL, exposure must be reduced to, "as low as reasonably practicable"
- The introduction of new requirements to observe principles of "good practice", in the control of exposure to substances hazardous to health to make sure WELs are not exceeded

Employers who currently comply with COSHH will still be able to do so by continuing to apply good practice.

NEW FIRE SAFETY LAW

When?

COMES INTO FORCE 2006

What it says...

As part of the Government's commitment to reduce death, injury and damage caused by fire, they have announced that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO) will come into force in April 2006.

The changes will consolidate existing fire safety law which is currently scattered across more than 70 pieces of legislation, to make it easier to understand and to comply with. The order will repeal the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and amend or remove wherever possible the many other provisions dealing with fire safety in other legislation.

Under the new law, greater emphasis will be placed on fire prevention and fire certificates will be abolished, ceasing their legal status. The "responsible" person for each non-domestic premises will be required to carry out a risk assessment of fire and take steps to reduce or remove risk. Such an assessment will need to undergo regular review and take into account not only your own premises but the effects of fire on anyone around you.

Coming Soon?

- Changes to the Control of Noise at Work Regulations which will include adjusted noise exposure action levels.

When?

COMES INTO FORCE FEBRUARY 2006

- Workplace smoking ban in Scotland

The Scottish Executive is proposing a workplace smoking ban

When?

EXPECTED TO COME INTO FORCE SPRING 2006.

- Vibration injury at work

Tougher controls on exposure to hand-arm and whole body vibration at work

When?

COMES INTO FORCE JULY 6, 2005, with exposure limit values being phased in between 2007 and 2014.

OTHER DECISIONS

NORTH WESTERN TRAFFIC AREA

LANCASTER, June 22, 2005
Pilkingtons (Accrington) Ltd, Accrington
Action: PSV - S14 - Application refused

MERSEYSIDE, June 28, 2005
John Marshall Hardern T/A Jubilee Quality Cars, Wintaston, Crewe
Action: PSV - S17 - Licence revoked with immediate effect
PSV - S28 - John Marshall Harden disqualified with immediate effect for an indefinite period.

FACT FILE

Additional advice on health & safety law, risk assessments or implementing a health and safety management system on-site is available from Aneeta Patel at Pro Enviro Ltd, Barclays Venture Centre, Warwick Science Park, Sir William Lyons Road, Coventry CV4 7EZ. Telephone 02476 323260, Fax 02476 323261, e-mail info@proenviro.co.uk

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To... mark.williams@emap.com

Cc... The Editor, *CBW*, Emap Active, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough, PE3 8DZ

AXLE LIMITS: A WEIGHT ISSUE

From: RH Eaglen, managing director, Eagre Coaches, Gainsborough, Lincs

I FEEL I must comment on your letter from Robin Hannay regarding VOSA action being taken on overweight coaches which he describes as 'illegal' (*CBW*, May 26).

The suggestion that we should have our vehicles weighed at a weighbridge and also check luggage and passenger weight is completely impractical. However, if all this was done and was found to be ok, dare we stop for a meal, as this will increase weight? Or indeed we could ask everyone to visit the toilet (not on the coach of course) to reduce the weight?

There is an average weight laid down for passengers which is probably insufficient for pensioner groups and over the top for junior school children, but which is considered on certification. Luggage weight is equally spasmodic - how is the driver supposed to check luggage weight at every stop when passengers are picked up? In the real world, every journey will have different people with different luggage.

Could I now suggest a sensible attitude? The VOSA issues all vehicles with a Certificate of Initial Fitness, which tells the operator that the coach in question is suitable for the task for which it is purchased i.e. in normal retail terms it is safe and of marketable quality. VOSA does the sums that Mr Hannay suggests using 65kg for passenger weight and 10kg per person for luggage weight and if a vehicle is not suitable and legal to fulfil its required task then the appropriate certification should not be given.

Once the certification is given the operator should be allowed to use it for the purpose it was intended - however, once more how can one check each passenger's weight and, indeed, their luggage?

a) For example, 49 seats should take 49 people

b) The luggage space should take their luggage

c) Common sense - a commodity not often in evidence today, should be used by the driver and VOSA when visiting Xmas markets, continental booze vendors, etc, as obviously the liquid refreshment is heavy, and should not be carried in bulk - if it is, operators and drivers beware.

I would suggest that those journeys are treated differently by VOSA but that tolerance and sense be used when normal luggage is carried.

Here I would point out that on airlines, luggage is weighed, but I have yet to see passengers being weighed. Neither have I heard of luggage being turned away but sometimes extra payment is made for this.

Surely it is obvious that a coach costing a quarter of a million pounds to a holiday specification, air-con, toilet, fridge, etc, is made for the job of carrying its proper seated capacity with their luggage.

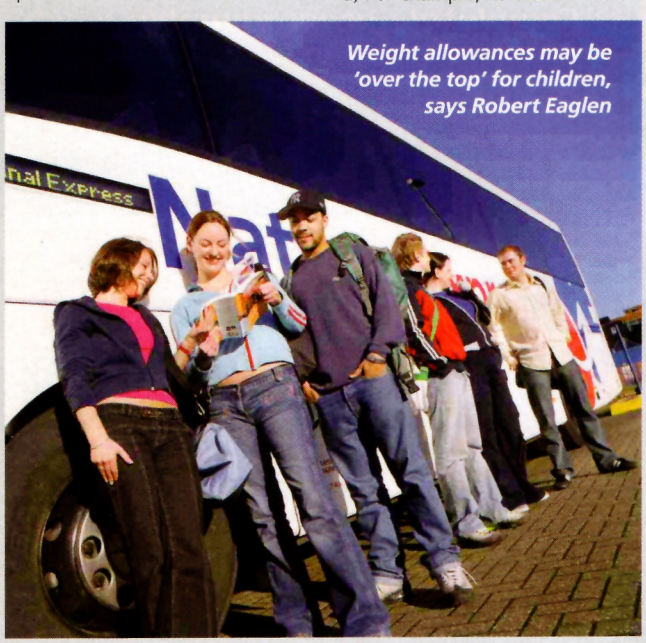
Once that coach in question has been certified for that purpose it should be allowed to do its job without harassment. However I agree wholeheartedly that the booze cruise brigade ought not to use the coaches as vans or lorries. Maybe Mr Hannay could provide those instead.

Finally may I finish my comments with a true story. Several years ago one of my drivers received an immediate PG 9 because his coach with a full load was overweight at a ministry check. When informed I asked to speak to the inspector who told me the rear axle was 8% overweight and that he was allowed to accept 5% only.

I requested that the driver be put on the phone, and as the coach in question had an empty driver's bunk forward of the front axle, I instructed the driver to remove the rearmost luggage and put it in the drivers bunk area. My thinking was that this would take weight from the rear axle to the front which had surplus capacity and also being in front of the front axle would help lift the weight off the rear axle.

The driver went to do this but came back virtually immediately saying that the inspector had moved the 'fat' ladies from the rear of the coach to the front and the 'thin' ladies from the front to the back – in doing so risking the wrath of one lady's husband who took exception to his wife being described as 'fat'. This done, the PG 9 was lifted.

Really, VOSA must accept its responsibility and rectify the situation by only certifying the vehicles which are ok and giving a 'non' to the rest. Once certified, please leave them alone.



Weight allowances may be 'over the top' for children, says Robert Eaglen

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FROM LOOS TO LUXURY

Bradtech has been around for 20 years this year, and from what Martin Cole, *CBW*'s technical and minibus editor, has seen, has never stopped innovating

CELEBRATING 20 years as a key supplier to the coaching industry, Bradtech is just as committed to excellence as it was when the company was formed.

Renowned as a leading specialist in fitting on-board systems, such as toilet compartments, water boilers and kitchen/catering equipment, the company has built a solid reputation for quality of products, quality of installation and quality of service.

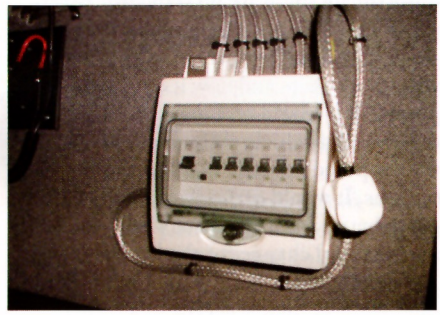
Managing director William Bradburn believes the reason for the company's success lies in its attention to detail and a constant desire to do better. He said: "We are seldom 100% satisfied with what we've done. We are always looking at finished installations and thinking of ways we could have done it better. It's this drive to seek improvement that generates new ideas and ways of working – resulting in a better service to our clients."

Washroom facilities with a touch of class

> 'It would be a major benefit to all concerned if vehicle manufacturers adopted the proposed upgrade to 48 volt electrical systems'

Bradtech never rests on its laurels and is always seeking to improve its products and installations – however the increasingly diverse market makes this a real challenge. The company has noticed a distinct growth from the minibus sector as increasing numbers of operators are now including drinks machines and fridges – creating a heavy demand for 12 volt appliances.

"Operators are continually seeking more on-board equipment," said Mr Bradburn.



Mains power - no standards to work to

Rear lounge area

Stylish litter bin

WHERE IT ALL STARTED

MR BRADBURN formed the company in 1985 alongside business partner Geoff Richardson, now deceased. Both had been working in the motor trade in the Wolverhampton area and Bradtech was originally located in Wolverhampton.

William Bradburn said: "We could see there was a need for someone to fit toilet compartments and water boilers to coaches and felt the market would increase. We won our first major order from Metro Cammell Weymann and installed toilet compartments in Metroliner double deck coaches. Because they were a success we found our services increasingly sought after and we were very soon involved with Leyland and assisted in developing facilities aboard the Royal Tiger."

Continued growth meant the company needed to seek more spacious premises in order to offer an on-site fitting service and adequate warehousing and production facilities for the growing range of products and necessary spare parts to ensure good back-up. In 1988 Bradtech moved to the Ladford Covert Business Park at Seighford, not far from Stafford, and just two miles from Junction 14 of the M6 motorway.

Since then, Bradtech's interests have also expanded into support for the wider passenger transport market, and into the marine and leisure sectors.

Mr Bradburn said: "We took coaches in to install the systems but eventually we found ourselves working with manufacturers and customers – building systems in as coaches were being constructed.

"We worked with manufacturers on developing standard units to simplify the process but too often we found the customer wanted changes made and extras fitting. It meant we ended up building more units up in our factory for assembly at the coachbuilder's plant."

Elegant servery system developed for Peter Caroll

"However, this causes us increased worries over the amount of available power. It is unfortunate there are no standards covering the electrical wiring systems because we have little choice other than to estimate what is adequate and how it can safely be provided. It would be a major benefit to all concerned if vehicle manufacturers adopted the proposed upgrade to 48 volt electrical systems. It would certainly make things much better for us – in fact we'd view it as a monumental change for the better.

"Some systems require equipment running on 240v mains electricity ratings and when we get involved in this we ensure all our wiring is armoured and could not be confused with ordinary vehicle electrics. Ring main systems aboard vehicles frighten me to death. We won't install them. Each item has a separate, direct feed with adequate in-line protection."

An ongoing crusade at Bradtech is the constant strive to ensure operators can provide their customers with high quality drinking water. Usual storage tanks to supply water boilers or for hot and cold drinks systems generally go no larger than 37 litres. This means a refill can be easily accomplished via a 25 litre Jerrycan filled at a drinking water tap.

"Water quality makes all the difference," said Mr Bradburn. "We've noticed ourselves, when we are at shows, that water left overnight in the boilers often means it's difficult to get a good cup of coffee the next morning, so we advocate regular changing. Where operators need to store more water and for longer periods, we supply additives that keep it fresh and clean. In fact – we can treat water to last for up to six months.

"With far more emphasis these days on Health and Safety issues, operators need to take proper care of their on-board water quality. But that is not the over-riding reason. It makes commercial sense too. One customer, a leading service operator, demanded the best possible water quality because he wanted his customers to have the best and be encouraged to buy more. The business from on-board drinks, at the time, was worth £20,000 per year – so it's

'Operators need to take proper care of their on-board water quality'

Typical boiler installation

Bradtech has all mouldings vacuum-formed

Well-equipped kitchen area for full on-board catering

worth protecting for that alone."

Bradtech says operators also need to be careful about filling up drinking water tanks from the hosepipe in the yard. Only food-grade hosepipes should be used – not the same pipes used for cleaning coaches and filling the radiator or windscreen washer bottle.

For quality and reliability, Bradtech builds its own water boilers on-site - using stainless steel. When the systems come back for repair or refurbishment, usually many years later, they are found to require very little attention - perhaps a new relay unit and possible replacement of pipes and unions.

Over 20 years, Bradtech's position in the marketplace commands considerable respect. Manufacturers work closely with the company when introducing new body designs to ensure certain items will fit and function correctly. If they can't be adapted it gives Bradtech time to prepare something that will. This element of trust between the two sectors is testament to the company's performance and its professionalism.

Diversity and development

HAVING diversified into the world of water treatment products, Bradtech has also branched into other forms of on-board hygiene – notably the supply of spill kits for dealing efficiently with spilt drinks or body fluids and solids.

Steve Ticehurst joined Bradtech 17 years ago and is now works director. He also had a background in the motor industry and is now a highly experienced member of the team. He confirmed William Bradburn's assessment that as the coach industry had steadily improved its services to passengers – that demand had required reliance on specialist knowledge.

"Operators are generally more aware now than they were," he told *CBW*. "Twenty years ago truck operators were on the ball and knew exactly what it cost per mile to run their vehicles and they costed them accordingly – knowing exactly where they stood all the time. The coach industry is beginning to catch up and now they pay far greater attention to operational costs."

This prompted William Bradburn to come up with an interesting observation on whole-life vehicle costs. He believes operators will need to look hard at how they balance the cost of a new coach against its predicted life in frontline service.

William Bradburn - managing director

Steve Ticehurst - workshop director

Whereas the usual format is for operators to cascade vehicles down the fleet and use the oldest examples on school contracts, the changing emphasis towards transporting children on specially designed buses will render these coaches surplus to requirements and could slow down the used vehicle market considerably – possibly to the detriment of residual values.

"Operators may have to look seriously at how they plan whole life costs," Mr Bradburn told *CBW*. "A real cultural change is needed to push for change and higher standards – so operators must get their prices up to cater for the situation. Where ticket price is too sensitive to stand a sensible increase, they must consider other revenue streams. Drink dispensers are an obvious alternative but food is now showing signs of being introduced in a big way.

"It still needs development because operators will want prepared meals stored in a ready-cooked condition – very close to its optimum eating temperature and requiring minimal time in the microwave. We are already looking at ways of achieving this but it underlines the need for more power availability and considerably more storage space.

"Although we've produced numerous kitchens for specialist applications, we've not had to consider high volume. Football team coaches are a different thing altogether. They tend to have few passengers and the players are usually on special diets."

Another new market emerging at present is the supply of small fridges to install on coaches running school outings. They are used for storing medication – such as insulin – and make it possible for some children to enjoy an outing with their classmates where, in the past, they would have perhaps been excluded.

BESPOKE OR OFF-THE-SHELF

EQUIPMENT supplied through Bradtech is chosen specifically for its quality. Mr Bradburn said: "We've been very fortunate in having some excellent suppliers and they've played a major part in allowing us to establish a strong business.

We can get parts from them very quickly and we have a good supply of components in stock at all times. We can guarantee next day delivery on virtually anything and in really urgent cases we can often deliver on the same day."

Many of the components used by Bradtech are proprietary items available to anyone, but the company's expertise and experience has led it to source or commission specific products, such as pumps, that will deliver an adequate performance. The company designs its own toilet tops and other ABS mouldings for which it produces the tooling and then supplies material direct to the vacuum-forming company. When working with coach manufacturers who use a specific colour and textured surface for their fittings – such as Bova, Bradtech obtains the raw material from that manufacturer and can have the mouldings produced on its own tooling. The installation then blends perfectly with its surroundings and becomes an integral part of the vehicle.

Bradtech's team of specialist installers was trained in-house and all new employees are given a thorough grounding across the range of products. Workshop director, Steve Ticehurst said: "It's something we've had to do. You can't expect anyone to come into our business with much of an idea of what it's about. We devise our own training because there is nothing available elsewhere that will give them the information and skills they need."

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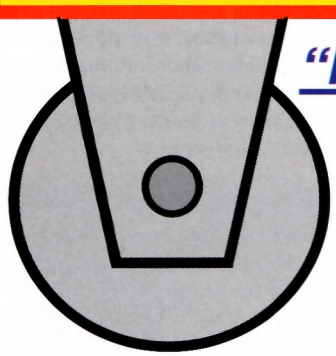

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PLANE SAILING

FENN Holidays of March, Cambridgeshire, has thrown its weight fully behind the premium holiday market by investing nearly £260,000 in a brand new 48-seat 13.84m Van Hool Astron.

The company will run the vehicle on its new 'Club Class' tours which offers passengers an airline-type experience, only with massive legroom and without the hassle of luggage check in. The pampered passengers get breakfast, a newspaper, free hot and cold drinks and - wait for it - access to the club lounge for champagne and snacks on ferry crossings.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	**Van Hool/ DAF XE 483bhp**
Body:	**Astron**
Transmission:	**12 speed ZF-Astronic auto/manual**
Seats:	**48**
Spec:	**climate controlled air con, travel pilot navigation, DVD/ CD, rear view camera, long squab 'Grand Luxe' seats**

"We feel people will pay more for an upmarket quality service," says Peter Fenn. "We can't compete with the budget airlines in terms of price, but we can compete in terms of service. 48 seats in 14m means an impressive amount of legroom and comfort for our passengers."

It seems his passengers are agreeing with him. Since introducing Club Class in 2004 the service has grown steadily - a "few more" tours have been added this year, and "quite a few more" in 2006. Fenn aims at the over 50 market, and the coaches go anywhere on continental Europe - "from France to Croatia".

Fenn has been buying Van Hools for the last 15 years, but not exclusively. What swung the deal this time was because Van Hool managed to achieve the interior layout Fenn wanted, without compromising vital leg room or luggage space, helped by the very high floor on the Astron.

As Peter Fenn puts it - "you don't want to offer a quality service and then tell your passengers they can't bring this and that."

Fenn is impressed by the coach so far-he has not had any operational problems at all. But he says 13.84m is about the limit - the wheelbase is hardly different from a 12m coach. He can see this length becoming the industry norm in Europe.

GROWTH FOR SLEAFORDIAN

SLEAFORDIAN Coaches, of Sleaford, in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council, has begun a new town network with two SlimLine Optare Solos. The services are already showing a 50% increase in ridership.

Sleafordian recently upgraded its commercial town service, acquired with the business of Wings Coaches, to feature an extended route and to operate throughout the day. The Solos operate two circular services giving a 30 minute departure from the town centre, using regular drivers. New bus stops have not yet been erected at all necessary points so both services operate on a 'hail and ride' basis around some of the estates.

Director Mark Broughton said the new arrangement meant Sleafordian retained its commercial service, but the partnership paid for the upgraded vehicles.

"We are working very closely with Lincolnshire County Council, and the eventual aim is to make the routes self-financing" he said.

"The buses are excellent, and perfect for the services," he added. "We have made a step change in quality, and this should attract more passengers in the long run."

The two 9.5 metre Solos each seat 32 passengers with provision for up to 13 standing passengers. They feature the larger six-cylinder Cummins ISBe engine, and Allison 2000 automatic gearbox. Painted in Lincolnshire County's distinctive two-tone turquoise 'it' (into town) livery, they have a four-camera CCTV system for added security. The Council is also promising to install raised kerbs at many bus stops, although the vehicles are fitted with manual folding ramps for wheelchair users.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	**Optare / Cummins ISBe 6 cylinder**
Body:	**Slimline Solo**
Transmission:	**Allison 2000 automatic**
Seats:	**32**
Spec:	**manual ramps, 4- camera CCTV**

OTHER DELIVERIES

Another Bova For Ellison's

ELLISON'S Coaches of St Helens, Merseyside, has taken delivery of another Bova FHD 12.340XE Integral 12m from Moseley (PCV). The high-spec includes air con with weather protection, Webasto pre-heater, 49 reclining seats with leather inlays and adjustable footrests, ASR traction control, water boiler and fridge, comprehensive audio-visual system and centre demountable toilet with stepwell and continental door.

Brace Of Bovas For Parnhams

PARNHAM Coaches of Ludgershall, Hampshire has added two more Bova Futura FHD 13.340s to its eleven-strong fleet, supplied by Moseley in the South. Both are 53-seaters, with centre toilet and continental door, fridge, water boiler, DVD and two monitors, air con and Webasto heater.

Fraser Eagle Alicron

FRASER Eagle of Padiham, Lancashire, has taken delivery of a Volvo B12B Van Hool Alizee T9 Alicron 12m coach from Moseley (PCV). The spec includes a flexible 49/53 seat layout, aircraft-style hatrack doors, chassis towing member plate, 420bhp engine and I-Shift gearbox, centre washroom, drinks facility and fridge, air con and colour monitor and wiring for DVD player.

Inter-Urban Eclipse

HEDINGHAM Omnibuses of Essex has bought a new Wrightbus Eclipse Urban on a Volvo B7RLE chassis. The 44-seat low floor bus will be used on services between Braintree and Great Yeldham and joins a 100+ vehicle fleet.

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BIG STEP UP FOR SEWARDS

SEWARD Coaches of Axminster, Devon, has bought a new 16-seat Optare Soroco minicoach, bringing its fleet to a total of 21 vehicles.

They are not all this small - Seward's has everything from a couple of other 16-seaters to a pair of yellow 57-seat ex-Army buses for the school runs - but owners Richard and Catherine Seward are detecting a move towards more compact coaches.

"It used to be that you'd rarely get groups of less than 35 people, but these days there is a definite move towards smaller groups," says Catherine. Why that is she's less sure. "Somebody with nothing better to do should sit down one time and look into it," she says.

Sewards are too busy for that at the moment, and will be until the schools break up.

The business is slap bang in the middle of a retirement area and its predominantly elderly customers do not like going out when there are lots of kids about. Until then, the Soroco is kept busy taking groups of oldies on day trips in the Devon area, and theatre trips. The customers are enjoying the raised seating position and refinements like air con.

"Compared to the rest of the fleet it has cost us a bit more money, but it's worth it," says Catherine. "It's brilliant on the open road. I took a small group out the other day by the scenic route. They had a great view over the hedges and the air con kept everybody very comfortable - they thoroughly enjoyed it."

Richard Seward is happy with the new vehicle too, apart from a small niggle: "It's going very well, we've had no problems running it - the only problem is the passenger entrance step is quite high for our elderly customers. The chassis passes right under the step so we can't cut it down anymore. We're holding fire on that one at the moment."
Anybody got any suggestions?

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	**Mercedes-Benz Sprinter/ 2.15 litre OM611**
Body:	**Optare Soroco**
Transmission:	**Sprintshift auto**
Seats:	**16**
Spec:	**air con at belts, tinted windows, ASR traction control, double rear wheels**

NEW PLAXTONS FOR LOGAN'S RUN

LOGAN'S Executive Travel in Antrim, Northern Ireland, renews around half of its Plaxton fleet every year. Low mileage, well cared-for vehicles maximise the marque's famously high residuals, and chopping them in at this stage means the fleet is always sparklingly new, and fitted out with the latest gadgets.

New for this year are internal and external CCTV cameras, a custom-made washer system from Bradtech, extra reversing lights which make up for the deficiencies of LEDs, and a light above the driver's seat which comes on even when the master switch is off.

But surely, earning enough to pay back the £2.5m investment in the 12 new Plaxton Paragon-bodied Volvo B12Ms they have just bought means they have to be run night and day?

"We don't work our coaches hard, we work them well," says Sean Logan. "We keep upping the standard because there are so many Joe Bloggs 'executive' coach operators out there, you have to give customers a reason to travel on your coach. The best reason is because of the comfort and specification of your coach - that way the journey becomes an add-on to the holiday, not something that needs to be endured until you get there."

The new Plaxtons are 12.8m long, the extra 80cm over the usual Logan vehicles has gone into moving the toilet to the back, it's while still retaining the leg room Logan's customers enjoy so much.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	**Volvo B12M/**
Body:	**Plaxton Paragon**
Transmission:	**Volvo manual**
Seats:	**50/ 53**
Spec:	**dark tinted windows, extra lights, custom serveries**

OTHER DELIVERIES

Reading Wrightbus

READING Buses has spent around £1m on eight new single-deck Scania Wrightbus Solars for its new lime green and beige liveried Premier Service. The vehicles are built on Scania L94UB chassis which increases seating capacity by 10%. Internal and external CCTV cameras are fitted, as well as accessibility ramps. The company is also investing in real time passenger information for all new vehicles and bus stops.

Newbury's Paragon

NEWBURY Coaches of Ledbury, Gloucestershire, has plumped for a new Plaxton Paragon-bodied Volvo B12M after a few years of buying late second-hand models. The coach will be used on a broad range of work, from UK holiday tours to private hire work, so the operator has specified a flexible 49/53 seat layout.

Chambers' Plaxton

Chambers of Stevenage has added its first Iveco Easyrider, with a 53 seat Paragon body by Plaxton, to its 25-strong fleet. The company first bought Plaxton in 1969 and has been a loyal customer ever since. The Eurorider will be used on a range of tours and private hire and has been specified with air con, a 352bhp 7.8 litre Iveco Cursor 8 engine and ZF automatic gearbox.

New Nouvelle For Grampian

GRAMPIAN Coaches – part of First Aberdeen – has added an Optare Nouvelle SR2 28-seat midi-coach to its 33-strong fleet. Smaller inbound parties are demanding smaller coaches but are unwilling to sacrifice big coach ride comfort and a good view the company says. It reckons the Nouvelle is the ideal compromise, especially with its large luggage capacity. A high spec includes air-operated swing door, tinted side windows, drinks console and DVD monitor.

WHAT'S NEW

ADL SIGNS UP LOOK CCTV

ALEXANDER Dennis has signed up LOOK CCTV as its preferred supplier for the next three years.

Lancashire-based LOOK has spent ten years in the industry, and has now fitted 6,000 CCTV systems in buses and coaches. Part of the Quadnetics Group plc, the specialist supplier designs, supplies and installs on-board CCTV. It has 50 staff and a turnover of £6 million.

"We chose LOOK CCTV as our preferred supplier because of the quality and reliability of their systems, their operational flexibility and ability to integrate seamlessly into our production process," said senior buyer of ADL, Kerstin Connor.

LOOK has been working with ADL since the company's relaunch: "Being chosen as preferred supplier by the largest bodybuilder in the country is a great opportunity for LOOK CCTV," said MD Alan Myers. "We are delighted to be working with ADL."

Alexander Dennis: working with LOOK since the start

Backing claims that CCTV can overhaul bad behaviour on the bus, Stagecoach Mansfield has now cracked the worst of the problems it was having with a late-night service in the town. Eight-camera CCTV systems with a large screen, fitted to its five Olympians, have been underpinned with joint funding from Mansfield Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Stagecoach.

The result since fitting in October 2004 has been a dramatic improvement in passenger behaviour, and helped earn local awards: "Over the past seven months we've had only one incident, which thanks to the high quality of the LOOK system recording has allowed the police to take the offender to court," said Mr Elliott.

● Contact LOOK CCTV on 01253 891222, or go to the website *www.lookcctv.com*

GUARD AGAINST INJURY CLAIMS

COMMON causes of injury in the coach industry come from manual handling of luggage – with sprains, pulled muscles, fractures and hernias often caused by incorrect handling procedures.

Minimise Your Risk points out employers have a legal responsibility to ensure drivers are adequately trained under basic health & safety legislation and specific manual handling regulations. This training must be carried out and be accompanied by a signed training record if operators are to avoid facing expensive settlements in claims and possible prosecution by the HSE.

Minimise Your Risk, in association with Scriptographic Publications, has produced a manual handling booklet called Handling Luggage – reducing risk of injury, to assist as part of any training course.

The publication also carries a 'test of knowledge' page which can be removed after training, signed and kept on the employee's file as evidence of the operator's compliance with the legislation.

● Details and a complimentary booklet are available by calling 01273 580189, e-mail *info@minimiseyourrisk.co.uk*

SCAN COIN'S LATEST

THE LATEST version of Scan Coin's bus driver cash deposit point, the CDP4-F, features front access for cash removal and servicing – taking up less space and not requiring a back office area.

The development also means upgrading machines does not involve any building work – simplifying and reducing the cost of installation. However, those wanting to upgrade can select a 'cash removal from the rear' upgrade.

● Contact Salford-based Scan Coin on 0161 873 0500 or via the website *www.scancoin.co.uk*

IN BRIEF

Think ahead to winter...

SNOW and ice on yards and approach roads can put you out of action, and with the weather so unpredictable, preparation is well worthwhile. You could, of course, wait for the council to turn up, but with their priority the major highways, you could be letting your customers down in the meantime.The latest SnowEx gritter, the V_Maxx 850, from Broadwood can be mounted in the back of any pick-up temporarily. It is powered by a 12-volt motor and has no pulleys or belts to go wrong, explaining the two-year warranty.

● Contact Broadwood International on 01794 388881.

Maywood gets Omer deal

VEHICLE lift suppliers Maywood has agreed an exclusive deal with Omer for the supply of scissor lifts up to five tonnes. The deal now gives Maywood exclusive deals with Hofmann and Finkbeiner mobile column lifts as well as its own, Europa, brand.

TfL contracts software

TRANSPORT for London has signed up Aligned Assets to supply its Symphonty Gazetteer software to maintain and enhance TfL's Additional Street Data – a central core of tools used by TfL to manage transport and co-ordinate roadworks in the capital.

JMP named in awards

JMP Consulting has been named for delivering the Best Local Government Project in the National Transport Awards. JMP worked with Dundee City Council on its £9 million Bringing Confidence to Public Transport, and SmartBus projects. BCPT involved developing traffic interchanges and installing touch-screen information terminals and WAP journey planning.

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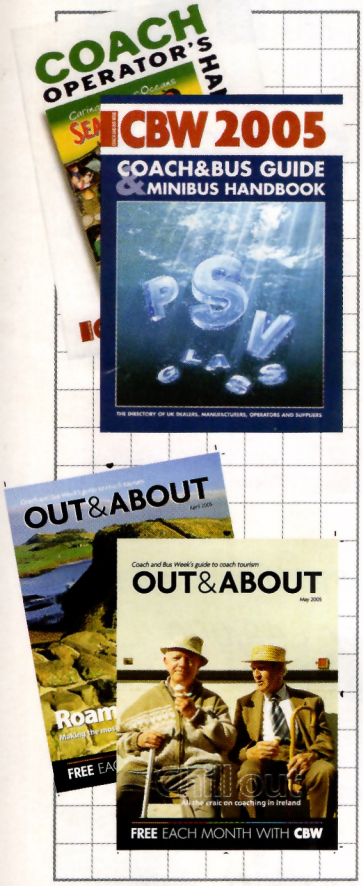

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ESSENTIAL SKILLS

BY 2008, whether you like it or not, your drivers will be expected to be heading towards a new 'CPC' standard which will involve additional training and a new qualification. The European Training Directive is still going through consultation, but could result in operators having to plan as much as 280 hours of training per employee.

You could wait until the regulation comes into force, but any time spent now, sourcing and researching training, could be time and money well spent. In addition to identifying the training available locally, looking into the training needs of staff should be an ongoing process. Operators with a training structure report bottom-line gains, such as reduced complaints and claims, reduced vehicle accidents and, above all, greater job satisfaction among their drivers. Trainng, particularly if it results in a formal qualification, converts a 'job' into a 'career' and improves the self-esteem of all employees.

The need for driving careers in particular to be enhanced is underlined by the serious problems many operators are having with recruitment. Paying a better wage does help staff retention, but ultimately can't make the job any more pleasant; training, on the other hand, may make a driver's life easier, with the possibility that the issue of wages may seem of reduced imprtance...

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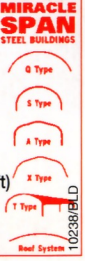

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AIG	6182	GHZ	6137	IJZ	9557	OKZ	6252	OUI	6326	PLZ	3055
AIG	6183	GNZ	6415	JJZ	2158	OKZ	6253	OUI	6371	PLZ	3061
AIG	6184	GNZ	8157	JJZ	2159	OUI	6274	OUI	6372	PLZ	3062
AIG	6185	HNZ	3726	JJZ	2422	OUI	6275	OUI	7085	PLZ	3063
AIG	6186	HNZ	3727	JJZ	2423	OUI	6276	OUI	7086	YIL	1648
AIG	6199	HNZ	3728	OKZ	6155	OUI	6295	OUI	7087	YIL	4557

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APPOINTMENTS & TENDERS

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Northamptonshire County Council wishes to invite tenders for the supply of one new and unused Iveco 75E17S EuroCargo chassis cab or equivalent, fitted with a Coachbuilt Early Years mobile library body.

Tenders will be considered for the supply of the chassis cab only, coachbuilt body only or the complete vehicle.

For full details please refer to the specifications in the tender.

Suppliers who wish to tender should apply for the tender documents, quoting reference G738, to the following address:

Sally Nicholls, Corporate Procurement Officer, PO Box 93, County Hall, Northampton NN1 1AN.
Phone: 01604 236691. Fax: 01604 237158
E-mail: snicholls@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Tender documents must be returned by noon on Monday 22nd August 2005.

9948/app

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APPOINTMENTS & TENDERS

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GARAGE FOREPERSON

Hull Depot

We are seeking a Garage Foreperson who will be directly responsible to the Depot Engineer and will work alongside the Assistant Depot Engineer to assist in the smooth and efficient management of the engineering facilities at the Depot, which currently operates 137 vehicles.

A thorough knowledge of vehicle maintenance within the PCV industry is essential.

Consideration will also be given to applicants from the commercial industry. Extensive knowledge of relevant legislation and a commitment to achieve the highest standards of maintenance and presentation in a cost effective manner are essential.

Responsibilities will include both hands-on as well as supervisory duties, including deputising for the Assistant Depot Engineer in his absence.

This is an excellent opportunity to advance your career into engineering management.

We offer a competitive salary and range of benefits, together with an attractive relocation package if necessary.

Applications, in writing, with a current CV should be sent to: Steve Chapman, Engineering Director, Stagecoach East Midlands, New Street, Chesterfield S40 2LQ.

Or e-mailed to: steve.chapman@stagecoachbus.com

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9563/TYR

APPOINTMENTS & TENDERS

trent barton

Engineering Manager - Derby

trent barton is a market-leading, award winning, medium sized independent bus operator based in the East Midlands. We operate some 350 buses and have a team of around 1000. We currently have a vacancy for an experienced Engineering Manager at one of our key locations.

This is an exciting opportunity for the right person to join the team of a progressive company with one of the most modern fleets in the industry. The duties associated with this responsible position reflect our commitment and focus on satisfying customer needs first time, every time.

The successful person must be able to:

- Deliver Maintenance to the highest of standards of roadworthiness and reliability
- Ensure vehicles are available to meet the daily service requirements.
- Effectively plan & manage a modern workshop
- Effectively lead and manage a dedicated maintenance team
- Maintain related documentation & records
- Maintain a clean and safe working environment
- Uphold compliance with VOSA requirements.
- Manage to an agreed budget.
- Communicate clearly at all levels and work as an effective member of the Service Delivery Team.

This is not a run of the mill position. trent barton is setting the pace in public transport by exceeding customer expectations. If you want to be a part of the team and believe you have what it takes to make a difference, we'd like to hear from you:

We can offer a Salary commensurate with experience and qualifications, circa £25,000, together with a Stakeholder pension and other benefits including 25 days holiday per year.

Please apply in writing, enclosing your CV to:
Jeff Counsell, Director of Service Delivery, trent barton, Mansfield Road, Heanor, Derbyshire, DE75 7BG
Or telephone 01773 536336 if you'd like to discuss the position in more detail.

Closing date for applications: Friday 3rd August 2005

9945/APP

Commercial Manager
Hampshire and Dorset

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First in Hampshire & Dorset operates some 438 vehicles, from operating depots throughout the two counties. Based in Southampton, the successful applicant will be responsible for ensuring that the commercial objectives, policies and requirements of First Hampshire & Dorset are met fully and on time whilst taking into account the needs of both the internal and external customer.

Reporting to the Deputy Managing Director, you will liaise with major stakeholders including traffic commissioners, local government officers and local employers, and also be responsible for a small commercial team delivering best practice and maximum efficiency.

The main responsibilities include:

- Managing the development, planning and monitoring of the Company's commercial network, including routes, times, frequencies and fares policies.
- Developing the business in terms of revenue growth and competitive tendering opportunities.
- Having a thorough knowledge of the market place.
- Representing the Company at stakeholder meetings.
- Ensuring that efficient, cost effective duty schedules are drawn up and maintained for each of the Company's five depots.
- Assisting in the delivery of the Company's price and product strategy.

For the right candidate, we offer an attractive salary and benefits package.

First operates an Equal Opportunities Policy and welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

To apply, please send your current CV and salary details to:

Marc Reddy
DeputyManaging Director
First
226 Portswood Road
Southampton
Hampshire
SO17 2BE

or email:
marc.reddy@firstgroup.com

Closing date:
8 August 2005

9947/app

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DIARY

SHELTER SKELTER

THE shifting sands of changing bus services are often a source of annoyance to passengers and ammunition for the 're-regulate' lobby.

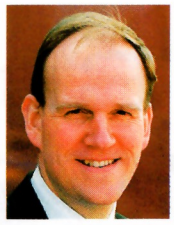
The fact that shops, pubs, sports facilities and other amenities open and close as they, too, face the changes in the market doesn't seem to generate anything like as many column inches in the newspapers as the demise of the 31a 1815 hrs departure from Little Snoring.

But the people of Barry, near Carnoustie, may have a point when they complain about the £12,000 spent on new bus shelters along the local bypass. The problem isn't the fairly palatial shelters, but the fact that there are no buses visiting them.

The new stops have been eschewed by Strathtay Buses because they are, apparently, half a mile from human habitation. Strathtay instead continues running through the village: "That's where people live," points out the bus company's spokesman.

Angus Council is, however, unrepentant, claiming that the shelters are now an encouragement for bus operators to devise cunning new services which use them. But not, presumably, before they've built a few houses nearby....

2 MINUTE INTERVIEW



FULL NAME Steve Whiteway
AGE 48
OCCUPATION Bus and coach businessman at Epsom Coaches
WHAT SHAPE IS THE COACH AND BUS INDUSTRY IN? The bus industry is doing OK, with plenty of attention, good and bad, from the media and politicians. The coach industry seems to be heading for ever tougher times and there will be further consolidation.
WHAT ANNOYS YOU MOST ABOUT IT? The coach industry underselling itself, coupled with the lack of professionalism of many operators.
WHAT IS ITS GREATEST ASSET? People like me.
WHAT WAS THE SMARTEST MOVE YOU EVER MADE? Taking on Clare, my PA
AND THE BIGGEST MISTAKE? My staff insist that I don't make mistakes, I am perfect!
WHICH CAR WOULD YOU LIKE TO OWN? Rolls Royce Phantom
WHO, WHETHER ALIVE OR DEAD, FICTIONAL OR REAL, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE AS PASSENGERS ON A LONG JOURNEY? Fred Dibnah, Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher and JR Ewing, all of whom have had some influence on my life.
WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE HOBBY? Anything from the 1950s onwards, as I live in the nostalgic past.

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